CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS UNDER THE T'ANG!

CONFUCIANISM: AND TAOISM

As we have seen, Confucianism experienced a fairly marked growth under the T'ang. In their personal practices and beliefs, the majority of the Emperors were probably more inclined toward Taoism or Buddhism than toward this "cult of the learned." Taoism, indeed, seems to have reached the apex of its influence at court. Ming Huang (Hsiian Tsung) gave much attention to it. He even made an effort to grant degrees for excellency in the study of the faith—perhaps thus seeking to give the school something of the prestige that accrued to Confucianism through that means. We hear, too, of a later ruler of the dynasty who seriously impaired his health by taking potions supposed to be the elixir of life. With such advocacy in high quarters, Taoism was popular in the nation at large. One of the celebrated eight "immortals" *(hsieri)* of Taoism, Lii Yen, lived in the eighth century and to him is traditionally attributed a famous Taoist treatise on ethics. Political expediency, however, demanded that the monarchs give official support to Confucianism. Here was a system on which government and society could be based far more effectively than upon Taoism or Buddhism. Taoism in its primitive documents would do away with much of government and social organization as the Chinese knew them, and in practice was individualistic and stressed the devotion of one's energies to the achievement of personal immortality through unsocial practices. Buddhism, otherworldly, with its eyes centered on life beyond the grave, demanded of those who followed it completely the renunciation of family and of participation in ordinary political and economic life. Confu-

cianism, however, was essentially this-worldly, emphasized the family and practical yet idealistic political theories, and was in accord with the traditional structure of Chinese society. Upon it, too, was based a system of government and education which had worked well under the Han and which the Sui and the T'ang found ready to hand (although somewhat shaken by the disorder of previous centuries), the agency which, probably more than anything else, had been the means of perpetuating civilization through the years of invasion and civil strife. It is not strange, therefore, that the T'ang reenforced Confucianism and further